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*Organization, Representation,
and Symbols of Power
in the Ancient Near East*

Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
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Administrators and Administrated in Neo-Assyrian Times

Simonetta Ponchia

VERONA

Mesopotamian reflection on law did not, as far as we can judge, reach the point of presenting the opposition between ancestral family law and state law in tragical terms, as impersonated by Antigone and Creon in the Sophoclean play.¹ Textual evidence from various periods, however, shows that the relationships between institutional levels based on kinship on one hand and on state administration on the other certainly presented critical points. Kinship-based groups with their organization and laws were fundamental for palace administration especially in certain periods and circumstances, as can be seen in the letters from Mari, offering one of the best examples of the tight interaction of these two components of the political system. In different contexts households maintained a crucial function in fostering the state economy. In recent studies the analysis of this relationship has been undertaken with renewed interest in the use of theoretical models as heuristic tools. The ensuing lively discussion was concentrated mostly on the Middle and Late Bronze period, exploring new perspectives in an attempt to find a definition of the system of authority in the ancient Near East and shifting the focus of historical reconstruction from the administrators to the administrated.² This is not the place to take part in the by-now wide discussion on these models, but it seems appropriate to mention them here as methodological reference points in the reconsideration of Neo-Assyrian administration. The reason for such an attempt may be described in the words of N. Postgate, who has recently drawn the conclusion that “the Neo-Assyrian administration was not bureaucratic, and depended on a sense of institutional loyalty and personal interaction up and down the system.”³ Hierarchy becomes thus “invisible”, at least in the texts, so it would be extremely important, despite the scarcity of

1. Ostwald 1986: 148-161.

2. Among the most recent works, the following offer the most comprehensive analyses: Schloen 2001, Fleming 2004, Seri 2005, Yoffee 2005. A detailed presentation in a historical perspective of the main theories applied to the study of Near-Eastern economy and society is provided in McGeough's 2007 analysis of the Ugarit economy. Original conclusions can be drawn by means of a *Network-based model of economic modalities*, which can also prove useful for later periods. Of general interest is also the analysis of E. von Dassow 2008 on Alalah administrative lists. In particular, the study of the personal story and career of individuals provides interesting insights into the administrative procedures and how they may reflect social and economic developments induced by political conditions (pp. 349-50).

3. Postgate 2007: 28 [358].

information found in the sources, to understand the roles and power of the members of the local communities in relation to palace administration.

1. Communicational Lines as Shown by Official Correspondence

A first perspective on the relationships between the official hierarchy and the other levels of society is offered by epistolary texts making reference to the communication between the king and his subjects.⁴ Direct communication between king and subjects may be regarded as a metaphor of the perfect kingdom,⁵ or as a fundamental characteristic of a structure based on personal interaction. Neo-Assyrian kings adhered to this model: the importance of speaking and listening to subjects is stressed in many letters – letters being themselves a very personal and direct means of communication – and everybody could appeal directly to the king.⁶

Large and important urban communities, moreover, could defend the privileges they enjoyed by appealing to the king. SAA 16, 96, for example, is an appeal to the king from the *ḥazannūte* and *parašmūte* of Assur, against the appointment of *qēpāni*, probably by the governor, for exacting taxes.⁷ In SAA 15, 230 some citizens voice their opinions about certain administrative procedures decided by the centre: in a conflict of authority between two officials, the inhabitants of Bit-Dakkuri – who, as expressly specified, are “citizens” – are determined to defend the rights granted by the king and refuse to obey to the official they do not like. In SAA 16, 97 the entire institutional and social structure of the city of Assur is illustrated in the introduction of the appeal to the king. The *ḥazannūte*, city scribe, *qaqqadāni*, and the citizens *šeḥru* and *rabū* repeatedly appeal to the king against the appointment of a certain person they consider a dangerous criminal to the office of *ḥazannu*.⁸

Another attested praxis was the delivery of communication by means of a royal envoy, who appears to be carrying out a royal order and not a routine administrative task. This role could be entrusted to various officials, but the *ša qurbūte* certainly had a special function in matters that implied maintaining or asserting central control, or strengthening local authority. The tasks of these officials often concerned people, who could be groups of deportees, inhabitants of client states, or Assyrians.⁹ In SAA 5, 104 the emissaries of the client state of Kumme refuse to

4. A comprehensive overview of the role of local communities in the governance of the empire, with particular reference to the circumstances and effects of communication, is offered by Garelli 1982. Another segment of the communication praxis (between king and officials and among the officials, especially in the provinces) has been examined in Ponchia 2007.

5. As shown by Hammurabi’s stela, which represents the word of the king predicated to everybody.

6. This relationship provides the fundament of the ideology and praxis of informing the king of everything, as expressed in letters and defined in the *adē*. Royal letters to the subjects, especially in the Babylonian area, have been recently commented on in Barjamovic 2004: 60-1. See in particular the royal letters ABL 926 addressed by Ashurbanipal to the citizens of Babylon; ABL 571, 301; SAA 18, 1. On the appeal to the king see Postgate 1974, Fales 2001: 179-83. For the communication with the king in general see Postgate 2007: 8 [338]-11 [343].

7. Urban magistrates were involved in the exaction of fiscal contribution, see e.g. SAA 1, 24 in which a *ḥazannu* and a *ša muḥḥi āli* are requested to bring forth the recipients of *iškāru* assignments, presumably to perform their work.

8. On the role of civic institutions in the appointment of officials see Barjamovic 2004 in particular 60-3, 91-3, and Ponchia 2007: 139.

9. On the role of the *ša qurbūte* see again Postgate 2007: 11 [341]-13 [343]. For their role in controlling and taking care of the deportees, see e.g. texts SAA 1, 10; 128; 5, 78; 105, 126; 15, 232; 256; 276;



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deliver a communication either to the governor or to the *ša qurbūte* and demand a direct audience with the king. Although the details are not clear, the letter suggests that the royal officials were the institutional channel to be used to communicate with the centre, but also that the fundament of the institution was the direct link between king and subjects, and that this could become a practicable –though not so frequent– procedure.

More often it was probably the *ša qurbūte* or some other officials who were entrusted with the task of answering the citizens' requests. SAA 18, 8 and 9 refer to the envoy of a *ša qurbūte* to Akkad with the task of returning fields to the sender, the legitimate owner. In SAA 15, 7, which is only partially preserved, the governor of Arrapha reports the appeal presented to the king by a group of people, to whom a royal *ša qurbūte* is probably sent.¹⁰

SAA 5, 15 is the defence of the governor of Amedi, Liphur-bel, who has been ordered by a royal *ša qurbūte* to leave the fields he has appropriated and to return them to their owner. The governor appears to base his defence on the principle that provincial administration is a hub for the interconnection and integration of the central and peripheral management of resources. He affirms that he has invested in the area, buying lands from the servants of Ašipa,¹¹ building a royal town, thus contributing to reinforcing the image of the king and to increasing the royal patrimony.

In the provinces, on the other hand, groups of citizens, probably organised in corporations at a local level, interacted with administrative offices and could even take important political decisions, as shown by the famous letter about Sasi's conspiracy in Guzana (SAA 16, 63). It seems that the leaders of the conspiracy considered it necessary, or at least conducive to its success, to gain the support of the members of the community represented by the *parašmūte*. These were probably the heads of the local families who provided the soldiers, and one of them is explicitly identified as a *bēl narkabti*.¹² The first, apparently ironic answer of the elders ("ask our sons") might perhaps refer to an attempt at depriving the civic institution of the elders of its traditional decisional power. The elders express their final decision by quoting Esarhaddon's treaty and declaring their loyalty to the crown, thus revealing that treaties were actually perceived as a means for establishing an institutional line of direct communication and dependence between the subjects and the centre.¹³

309; 317. The presence of the *ša qurbūte* were probably aimed at preventing the governors from gaining too many personal advantages and at guaranteeing the central coordination in the management of this important resource. SAA 18, 56 is an intelligence report on various Babylonian matters, including the behaviour of Nabû-ušallim, the ruler Esarhaddon installed in Bit-Dakkuri, after the defeat of Šamaš-ibni. The adhesion of the new ruler to Assyrian procedures is formally perfect: he refuses to consign the fugitives (scholars, eunuchs and soldiers of Šamaš-ibni) to the sender, without the sealed order of the king and the presence of a *ša qurbūte*.

10. On the contrary, SAA 15, 168 shows a *ša qurbūte* accompanying the illegal expedition of the employee of a governor to ravage the household of another official. The reasons for this misbehaviour are not given in the letter reporting the fact, and the role of the *ša qurbūte* is left unexplained. We may either suppose that he might have officially authorised the crime or that he simply took part in it.

11. It is impossible to say whether this means that the fields were located in the adjacent area of Tidu, whose governor bore the same name.

12. On their status, which is not completely clear, see also Deszö 2006: 116-7. On the reading see Radner 2002: 10. For a general reconsideration of military organisation see Postgate 2007: 13 [343]-23 [353].

13. A possibly similar situation is referred to in ABL 1274 in which the citizens of Ur admits that their leader has paid homage to the rebel Šamaš-šumu-ukin out of desperate necessity, implying that they are still loyal to Ashurbanipal (see Barjamovic 2004: 62-5).



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This link is reaffirmed in SAA 16, 64 in which the sender, the so called “anonymous informer” advises the king to take care of denunciations, coming both from somebody belonging to the administrative body and from someone dependent from a private citizen (an Assyrian), probably as a means of fostering the royal authority and encouraging good administration.

The rhetoric and practice of communication was not only a prerogative of the centre but could also be used and elaborated according to a specific code by the public. These procedures and the ideological tenet are aimed at reaffirming central control.

On the other hand, the examples quoted reveal that the dialogue between people and civic institutions on one side and peripheral and local administrators on the other was often difficult, both when the administrators were executing royal orders and when they were acting autonomously, and especially when they took advantage of their position for personal gain. Letters also provide some scraps of this dialogue and some details on the nature of these institutions.

The attempts at avoiding forced labour imposed by state officials are documented by records of flight, insubordination, and complaints about excessive demands. In some cases we may imagine that a network of solidarity formed to oppose this pressure, as suggested by SAA 1, 171 in which Bel-duri denounces two of his employees, who had been probably helped to flee and covered for by their community of origin.¹⁴ SAA 1, 240 shows that entire groups of people could flee to dodge forced service in provincial ranks. The dialogue and any attempts at persuading them are utterly impossible: *laššu lā išmeu* (l. 8').¹⁵

Others chose other forms of opposition and resistance against the misdemeanours of the administrative apparatus. In SAA 15, 121, the owners of people unduly detained by a prefect not only speak out their claims to the governor, but seem to refuse to carry out their service until the matter has been settled in a satisfactory manner. The situation is therefore referred to the king to induce those responsible to return the detainees. In SAA 15, 15, despite the fragmentariness of the text, it appears that the contention concerns the authority exercised over some people enrolled in the chief eunuch's teams. They appeal to the king because some members of their family have been unduly employed in corvée work in Dur-Šarruken. The governor insists that he has acted correctly: *man-nu* [LÚ*.rak-s]u ša ŠEŠ-šú šúm-ma DUMU ŠEŠ-AD-šú [ú-še-š]i-ú (ll. 4'-6'), “which [recruit]'s brother or even cousin has been taken out?” and imposed the respect of the legal conventions that guarantee correct administration: *memmēni issihunu lā idabbub*, “nobody will litigate against them.”

Legal procedures, on the other hand, are not enough to guarantee justice, as is shown by the oil-pressers' letter (KAV 197), where it is reported that widows of members of this professional group had been enslaved by means of faked debt contracts.

Rules are broken at various levels. In SAA 13, 20 the sender claims that the shepherds in charge of cultic meals refuse the sheep due as fiscal contribution and respond to the orders with open rebellion. This attitude not only has practical consequences in the administration, but is also particularly detrimental to the image of the state, as the sender points out: “If these people who are Assyrians refuse to

14. The translation of the term *kalzi* as “community”, however, is not completely certain.

15. About flight see also SAA 16, 105: the son of a *mušarkisu* killed in battle accused the fifty men at his father's orders of abandoning their duty and hiding out. See also GPA 207. SAA 1, 224 attests a quite surprising strategy to avoid compulsory work: entering a fortress.



fear the king, my [lord], how will foreigners behave [towards] the king my lord?" (SAA 13, 19). In two other letters sent to the king by Taklak-ana-Bel governor of Nasibina (1, 235-6), a *rab kišri*, again in charge of the sheep, is accused of stealing sheep, seeking refuge in a temple and not providing the men requested to work in Dur-Šarruken. In a passage of the second letter the governor quotes the words of the *rab kišri*: he refuses to be appointed under the orders of another official and affirms that he wants to serve in his own community (*kalziya*).

The evidence is certainly unbalanced in favour of the procedures of the central control, which are much more documented than those of other segments of the administration. The affairs of the provinces, for example, are documented only when they are transmitted to the centre, while the level of interaction between provincial offices and the administrated is certainly under-represented. Despite these limitations, we may conclude that both legal procedures and personal negotiation were the practical systems used by administrative departments to interact

with each other and with social institutions. In these procedures the collective dimension of family, professional groups and local communities plays an important role. It is therefore necessary to turn to private documents to gather additional details in order to understand the matter in more depth.

2. Social Relationships as Shown by Private Documents

2.1. The Case of Assur

The private archives of Assur, recently made available thanks to the efforts of various scholars,¹⁶ are a particularly rich source of information on the city social structure. The legal texts, in particular, provide interesting data about some groups of skilled workers probably organized into a collective; they are identified either as specialists working for the temple or the palace, or on an ethnic basis (which would in any case be presumably connected to a specific profession). In some cases these people are explicitly identified as members of a *qinnu*, — a term which has been translated “brotherhood” or “guild” — on the basis of their profession. While the reference to profession seems more cogent, it is evident that various family links existed within the *qinnu*, since the profession of the father was taken up by the son, the members acted together in private business and divided properties and inheritances among themselves, but the boundaries of family and *qinnu* can not be exactly determined.¹⁷ One of the most prominent groups are the goldsmiths working on the temple of Assur. The members of the group formed a sort of “guild” and probably had an institutional role in the local offices, such as the office of *hazannu* held by Sin-na'id and Issar-na'id.¹⁸ The latter was plausibly the same person mentioned

16. Fales & Jakob-Rost 1991, Deller, Fales & Jakob-Rost 1995, Radner 1999, Donbaz & Parpola 2001, Faist 2007.

17. For discussion on the value of the term *qinnu* see Fales – Jakob-Rost 1991, 24–26 (who, in examining one of the *qinnus* of the town, conclude that: “the *hundurayyus* appear to be taking care of their private businesses through some mutual bond and general franchise which could have to do with their public collegiate status.”) and Radner 1999, 25–33. It is in any case impossible to define a specific institutional meaning and, for the moment, we prefer to consider it a generic term.

18. Radner 1999; Donbaz & Parpola 2001: 159-72. On Sin-na'id's position and family see Radner 1999: 15-19, who also quotes an Aramaic document (VAT 7498) in which the father of Sin-na'id bears the title of *hzn' glh*, interpreted as equivalent to *hazannu* of the Aššur gate. Issar-na'id is attested in



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in the, unfortunately fragmentary, protest sent to the king by the citizens of Assur SAA 16, 97 (quoted above).

The *hazannu* is appointed by the king, which corroborates the authority of the official and his right of direct access to the king, as is suggested by the opening of one of Sin-na'id letters recalling the royal appointment (SAA 13, 25). He claims he has judicial authority in a case, probably to prevent possible objections. At the same time, he seems to worry that other officials may exercise excessive control over the city (or diminish his personal authority?) and asks for the intervention of a *ša pān ekalli*, who, as envoy of the palace, may presumably have acted as an ombudsman.¹⁹

SAA 13, 33 is particularly interesting because the *hazannu* Issar-na'id and the *šangû šaniu* of the temple of Aššur denounce the abuses of some officials of the Ituayyu, probably a police corp. The letter reports that the protests of the city officials were not effective against the violent attitude of the Ituayyu, but is a proof that, albeit in this case unsuccessfully, the urban magistrates interrelated with members of other branches of the administration.

Although it is impossible to reconstruct the specific circumstances, we may stress how overall royal control was perceived as important in the delicate balance between local autonomy and excessive rivalries. This aspect should be reconsidered vis-à-vis the programmatic declarations of the kings about the privileges of the cities, in an attempt to evaluate the force urban communities could have when putting forward their requests.

It is important to note that these *hazannus* are themselves members of the *qinnu* organization.²⁰ The legal text BM122698 records the division of inheritance between the children of Sin-na'id and Sukki-Aia, probably his brother. Despite the probably more prestigious position of the *hazannu*, all the members of the professional groups of the goldsmiths are equally referred to as *bēl dēni parāsi*.²¹ To confirm the importance of this collective structure in legal matters, we may quote the mention of the *qinnu* in the no-claim clauses in N9 (84) = NATAPA 53 (from the archive of the *Hundurāyē* from Assur).²² Its influence as a collective on the life of the town cannot be exactly defined and it is impossible to ascertain what role the central figures of these groups played as representatives of the entire *qinnu* and how this role interrelated with the government of the town.²³ A corporative management of the *qinnu* can be inferred by references to all or to various members in some of the

BM122698 and VAT 10007+, where two other *hazannus* belonging to the Goldsmiths are listed: Aššur-šadduni and Ahulamma (for all the attestations see Radner 1999: 20-1).

19. Donbaz-Parpola 2001, 159–172. On Sin-na'id's position and family see Radner 1999, 15–19, who also quotes an Aramic document (VAT 7498) in which the father of Sin-na'id bears the title of *hzn'gh*, interpreted as equivalent to *hazannu* of the Aššur gate. Issar-na'id is attested in BM122698 and VAT 10007+, where two other *hazannus* belonging to the goldsmiths are listed: Aššur-šadduni and Ahulamma (for all the attestations see Radner 1999, 20–21).

20. On the interaction between the professional—and therefore public—activity and the family business of the *qinnus* of Assur, see Fales 1997.

21. On the possibility of a rank order within the group see Radner 1999, 21. According to the scholar (p. 31) the relationship between family and *qinnu* is very tight, but it seems that belonging to a professional group was considered more important, or at least as important as, the appurtenance to a family.

22. Ll. 9'ff.: "Whoever in the future [or in all time], be it PN1, be it PN2, be it their sons, be it [their nephews(?)], be it his son(?), be it their prefect (*šaknu*), be it one of his *qinnu*, be it a neighbour of theirs], who seeks lawsuit and litigation ..."

23. It is obviously more difficult at present to demonstrate whether their role may be compared to those of other representatives of the interests of the community such as e.g. the *rabiānum* of OB period (Seri 2005: 51-96).



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documents quoted above and in the lists of witnesses in various deeds, but also by the fact that the oil-pressers' letter KAV 197 was sent by the group as a whole.

Other interconnections with the administrative apparatus are suggested by the evidence provided by another archive from Assur, the archive of the Egyptians (N31). A particularly significant text in this respect is StAT2, 207, attesting the sale of the house Urdu-Aššur has inherited from his father. In the no-claim clauses it is said that the deed is not to be contested by family members, by the seller's *hazannu*, his *rab kišri*, and the governor (EN.N[AM]). A *rab kišri* and a *rab haššē* recorded among the witnesses might belong to the Egyptian group.²⁴ In StAT2, 213 another Egyptian, Huru, bears the title of *rab kišri*. Together with five other people, he borrows horses belonging to Urdu-Aššur, the person named most often in the archive, which are subject to the king's *iškāru* tax. The text suggests that a crucial aspect of the functioning of these structural groups and of their relationships with the administrative system was the organization of the fiscal contribution, of which, however, only scant evidence is found in the legal documents (for parallel cases see StAT 2, 210-2).

These attestations suggest that the *qinnu* structure played a role not only in the internal regulations of legal matters, properties, etc., and in proposing a civic magistrate such as the *hazannu*, but also in the state administration. The main question is whether the *rab haššē* and the *rab kišri* could be chosen among—and, at least sometimes, by—the *qinnu*, and whether this functioned as the point of contact with the state administration.

The prosopographical analysis can be extended to investigate possible connections of a certain group with palace offices. As an example we may quote the case of the *atû* Nergal-iddina, who is attested in the role of witness in the archive of the Egyptians N31 in more than one occasion. He is the second witness (after a *rēšu*) in a *sartu* document of the archive (StAT2, 198) and is also quoted with the indication of his profession in an inheritance division (StAT2, 201), in the sale of a house (StAT2, 207), in a loan contract (StAT2, 209) and probably in a sale of slaves with a possibility of ransom (StAT 3, 88 Nergal-[iddina?]); we find him quoted without reference to his profession in a marriage contract (StAT 2, 184) and a loan (StAT 3, 78). There may be two possible explanations for his frequent presence among the witnesses: either he has particular connections with this group (be his origin Egyptian or not), or acting as witness is part of his office duty as *atû*. In StAT 2, 181 he is listed together with his son Rib-Aya, which suggests again an involvement of family groups in certain social or administrative roles.

Besides the interconnections with the state hierarchy, another relevant aspect to be considered is the relationships between the different groups living in the town. StAT 1, 10, from the Goldsmiths' archive (N33), shows La-turammanni-Aššur in the position of creditor. He is known from the Egyptian archive to be a *rab haššē* of that group, and is also in contact with the *Hundurâyē*. StAT 1, 13 records a silver loan made by the master of the *Hundurâyē* Mudammiq-Aššur to two members of the Goldsmiths' guild, Nabû-balaṭu-iddina, son of Nabû-zeru-iddina, and his uncle Sin-ballissu son of Aššur-hussanni, probably for commercial reasons (the debtors are defined *bēl harrāni*). In N33, 14 Nabû-zeru-iddina lends a sum labelled *rešāte ša Aššur* to La-tubašanni-Aššur, who is mentioned in text NATAPA 61 from the

24. The orthography of what seem to be the name of an Egyptian is fluctuating: *Pi-na-ia-u-a* and *Pi-na-ia-u; Ra-ah-pi-u-a-a*" seems to bear the title of *rab kišir*, but the text has a small lacuna at this point.



Hundurāyē archive (N9). In NATAPA 39, from the same archive, the *hazannu* Sin-na'id sells a slave to Mudammiq-Aššur. The name of Bisu'a, possibly the same person mentioned in the archive of the *Hundurāyē*, is also listed among the witnesses in the Goldsmiths' texts StAT 1, 19 and 22, where he is part of the group of the *susānu* of Aššur.²⁵

A particularly in-depth view of the relationships is offered by the sale contract StAT 1, 22 –extensively discussed by Radner– since it is sealed by civic authorities: Ereš-Aššur, *hazannu* of the Assur gate, Qibit-Aššur, *hazannu* of the Šamaš gate, Pan-Aššur-lamur, *hazannu* of the Tigris gate, Nabu-šadduni, *ša muhhi āli*, Mušezib-[], *rab eširte ša tupšarri*. The sale is witnessed by a number of goldsmiths, bakers, grooms of Aššur, all grouped into categories, and by other people, mostly identified with a patronym, whose role is not clear. They might have been neighbours of the seller, or simply colleagues or friends of one of the contracting parties. Although the circumstances that make this transaction so important are not clear, it appears that professional groups had an interest in it and that they probably exercised a form of control together with civic institutions.²⁶

Professional and family groups had certainly differentiated position and roles which evolved in time and it is impossible to reconstruct the internal organization and degree of cohesion of these groups. Nevertheless we may conclude that they played a role at various institutional levels and were presumably a point of contact between the administration of the resources controlled by the crown and those managed by other administrative departments.²⁷ To substantiate this general statement it would therefore be necessary to carry out a more thorough analysis conducted in a diachronical perspective and taking a wider range of data into account.

2.2. Peripheral Areas

It would be extremely important to compare the outline provided by the archives from Assur with the situation in peripheral areas. In this case the view is particularly blurred due to the nature of the sources, but not completely obscured.

Some parallels may be singled out, at least as far as titles and roles are concerned, even in village contexts. An interesting example is SAA 14, 425 (= TIM 11, no. 1) in which Zabdī, a *māhišu*, son of Hati-il from the village of Nabû-šimanni, under the care of the *šaknu* Nabû-balassu-iqbi, sells an estate in the same village to

25. See also N9, 14, in which Sin-na'id, [Nabû]-šadua, a *ša muhhi āli*, and the *rab eširte* of the scribes seal a document of sale that has been attributed to the archive of the *Hundurāyē*. For the contacts between the Goldsmiths and other groups, such as cooks, see StAT 1, 12, which records a loan by Mušezib-Aššur, who, according to Radner, may be a high ranking member of the latter group, to Aššur-aplu-iddina. Aššur-aplu-iddina bears the title of *qatinnu ša ekurrāte* and appears as debtor also in StAT 1, 10, where he receives silver from La-turammanni-Aššur (a central figure in the Egyptians archive), and could be the same who witnesses StAT 1, 2 and 13.

26. The sale of slaves in StAT 1, 181-2, despite the uncertainties in attributing it to a specific archival context, gives useful hints about the relationships between family or "guild" groups. The seller is identified as a citizen of Assur (a man from the Inner City); in the list of witnesses there are two brothers, as may be inferred from the patronym, further specified by the profession of *šēlapayyu*; others are identified by their title of *rab haššē* or *rab eširte* which might even refer to a *qinnu* structure, others have Egyptian names.

27. For the economic activities of the *qinnus* see, among others, texts N33 (StAT 1), 13, 15, 16, 18, 35 for the archive of the Goldsmiths; for the archive of the Egyptians see N31, 171, 173-4, 176-90, 196 concerning loans of cereals, 191-95, 202-4, 208-9, 214-28, etc. about silver loans. The comparison of the entrepreneurial role of these groups with the Neo-Babylonian guilds is a complex problem which cannot be dealt with here appropriately and which requires a more thorough understanding of the situation.



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a *rab kišri ša šēpē ša ēkalli*, son of the *sartinnu*. The editors translate the profession of the seller with “mounted archer”, but the more traditional translation “weaver” cannot be excluded. The reference to the patronym and the origin of the seller suggests that he is a resident in the village, while it is made explicit that he is under the care of an administrative official. La-tubašanni-Dadi, who possesses a bordering estate and witnesses the deed, is also a *māhišu*. Moreover, the list of the witnesses includes some officials of the *ša šēpē* group, the *šaknu* of the *māhišāni* mentioned in the first part, a *rab haššē* of the *māhišāni*, and another *rab haššē* of [] of the crown prince. It also includes some people who are identified by means of their patronym, one citizen (DUMU) from Arbela, and four witnesses from the village, who may include the seller’s neighbours. *Mutatis mutandis*, a social structure similar to that existing in Assur can thus be recognised on a smaller scale in this village, where each group is identified through their profession, and their heads and representatives have relations with the state administration.

Useful hints may also be derived from the archive of Dur-Katlimmu.²⁸ The main character here is a state official, a *ša qurbūte*, which is often quoted in connection with other members of the military entourage. Among the witnesses of the deeds in which he is a contracting party there are some references to family links: Mannu-ki-Arbail and his children Iddin-ahhe and Šamši(a). Their position or profession is never recorded, so we can hypothesise that either they are the representatives of a local elite and play a role in the relationship with the military and provincial administration, or they are members of the administrative or military hierarchy like other officials quoted in the sources.

The archive also includes instances of people being sold. These deeds are witnessed, as was usual, by a number of witnesses, including people coming from different places in the Habur and Euphratic area. The question is whether this fact may be related to a form of control on people and on slave merchants’ operations in the whole area and what role local and civic authorities played in this.²⁹ In this context the interconnections among the various components of society are probably less articulated than in the religious capital Assur, but cover a wide area because of the important position of the town in the communication network and in relation with the needs of the military administration.

This archive may be compared with another quite large group of texts from Nineveh, belonging to the *mukil appāte* Remanni-Adad.³⁰ These texts suggest the possibility of singling out some differentiated procedures. Due to the lacunae in various documents, the interpretation proposed here is only tentative. In a few deeds one of the contracting parties is a member of the administrative/military apparatus. In this case the witnesses come mainly from the same sector and the no-claim clauses mention only relatives of the person who cedes his rights (see e.g. SAA 6, 301; 305-6; 315-6; 329-30).

In other cases the seller is not identified by an official title and the fact that some members of the administration are included in the no-claim clauses besides the family members may suggest that he occupies a subordinate position in the hierarchy, and/or he is part of a village community over which state officials and

28. The town, situated on the site of modern Tall Šeḫ Hamad, on the eastern shore of the Habur river ca. 70 km north of Deir ez-Zor, played an important role as centre for military operations

29. I.e. whether we should interpret the simple note PN from GN as implying that PN is acting as representative of the citizens of GN. See also Bellotto & Ponchia 2006.

30. On this high official of Ashurbanipal’s court and his entourage see Fales 1989.



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the *hazannu* exercise some authority (SAA 6, 328, and in particular 314; 326, 334; 335, 336, 343-44; we cannot say if 299 is part of this group, since its beginning is broken).³¹ SAA 6, 325 records the sale to Remanni-Adad of an entire village belonging to ten inhabitants of the village itself: the *šaniu* of the village, a scribe of the [queen] mother, a *mukil appāte*, a *tašlišu*, 3 *rab kišri*, 3 *mār [banê]*. Among the witnesses there are *sartinnu*, *sukkallu dannu*, and a number of military and palace personnel, probably because the sale involves a large property and several members of the administration. The fact that all the sellers are men of the village suggests that they owned an undivided family property or a communal property. In either case, we can suppose that it was a local group, similar to the *qinnus* of Assur as far as internal organization is concerned, which was integrated into the Assyrian administrative and military apparatus.

The acquisition of land property by Remanni-Adad is concentrated in districts that are crucial either from the point of view of crop production (for example the wine zone) or from the military point of view (the Habur valley). The social picture is varied, and includes individual owners, local communities and owners of latifundia, whose complex relationships with the state administration are the result of quite a long process of interconnections.

3. Conclusions

We will not try here to fit the pieces singled out so far into a coherent picture, but rather we will propose some general considerations and themes for further inquiry.

Family and professional groups or civic institutions may have had a “protective” function against the two fundamental dynamics that pressed people in the Neo-Assyrian imperial system: fiscal and levy pressure and the unfair alteration of property rights. The tools they could resort to were communicational procedures and the authority still maintained by some civic institutions in the exercise of justice and in the control of legal transactions.

Singling out the cases of “personal interaction up and down the system”, the administrative hierarchy becomes less “invisible”, at least at certain levels, with some of its members being at the same time involved in family business and in various enterprises. It is therefore necessary to consider the governed not just as passive subjects of the taxation system, but rather as active agents in the production and circulation of goods and in the management of manpower. In this context communication took various forms, not least that of negotiation.

31. SAA 6, 314: two people sell various vineyards in the region of Izalla, claim is forbidden to their governor (EN.NAM) and [], among the witnesses there are the governor, a *hazannu*, a *tašlišu*, 7 persons probably from the town of [Ispallure] where the estate was located, members of the Niniveh court (a fact that may indicate that the deed was actually written in the palace offices); 326: an entire village near Nerab in the district of Arpad is sold probably by 3 men who may be private owners; the no-claim clauses include: *šaknu*, *hazannu*, *bēl pihati*; the list of witnesses –in the part that has been preserved– includes military personnel; 334: the estate seems to be a family property, since the sellers are father and son; in the preserved part of the no-revocation formulae the *šaknu* is mentioned; 335: three individuals sell a large composite property in the area of Qatna, no-claim clauses include *šaknu* and *hazannu*, the broken witness list includes: *sukkallu dannu* and *šaniu*, military personnel, etc.; 336: three individuals sell large composite estate in the province of Arrapha, which seems to be a family property because two of the sellers might be brothers or relatives and the third is the son of one of them; the no-claim clauses include the *šaknu*, but is incomplete; 343-344: sale of servants by four brothers, in the no claim-clauses *šaknu* and *hazannu* are mentioned.



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These perspectives ought to be more thoroughly investigated on the basis of diachronical developments and the marked differences due to the wide extension of the empire. Other aspects that would need further investigation include the possibility that in some contexts the relationship with the administrative structure may have altered the social balance; that affiliation to the army or the administration may have tended to substitute for family or group affiliation; that the centre may have developed new procedures and bureaucratic tools to increase the control on the interactions between the local institutions, administrative offices and productive forces.

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